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Letter dated 3 March 1999 from the Permanent Representative of Turkey to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to transmit herewith a letter dated 3 March 1999, addressed to you by His Excellency Mr. Aytuğ Plümer, Representative of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (see annex).

I should be grateful if the text of the present letter and its annex would be circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda item 62, and of the Security Council.

(Signed) Volkan VURAL
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

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ANNEX

Letter dated 3 March 1999 from Mr. Aytuğ Plümer addressed to the Secretary-General

Upon instructions from my Government, I have the honour to refer to the letter dated 19 February 1999 addressed to you by the Greek Cypriot representative at the United Nations, which contains false allegations regarding cultural property in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (A/53/836-S/1999/178).

Previous allegations concerning the cultural heritage of Northern Cyprus have been amply dealt with in our previous communications addressed to you, most recently in my letter dated 16 October 1998 (A/53/519-S/1998/973). Suffice it to say that it has been the Greek Cypriot side, with the support of Greece, that has systematically tried to eradicate the Turkish-Muslim heritage of Cyprus, in particular during the ethnic cleansing campaign directed against the Turkish Cypriot people between 1963 and 1974. A list of 103 mosques and Islamic holy sites destroyed or damaged during this period was circulated as an appendix to the said letter.

The Greek Cypriot administration, which tries to present itself as the champion of conservation of cultural heritage, continues, on the one hand, to show utter contempt for what is left of the Turkish-Islamic heritage in South Cyprus, where Ottoman Turkish shrines are under threat of disintegration due to total neglect, and, on the other hand, systematically blocks the flow of any external financial or technical assistance to the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus for conservation purposes.

The policy of the Government of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus is to protect the cultural heritage of Northern Cyprus irrespective of its religious and cultural origins. The relevant competent authority in Northern Cyprus, namely the Department of Antiquities, works diligently to realize its objectives with available resources. Within this context, the preservation of cultural and historical sites through reuse is carried out in accordance with international instruments governing the preservation of cultural heritage.

In view of the foregoing, it is clear that the allegations of the Greek Cypriot side concerning cultural heritage have no basis and are aimed at portraying Cyprus as a Hellenic island with an exclusively Christian background. No amount of propaganda and rhetoric can change the reality that the Turkish Cypriots are sovereign equals and co-owners of Cyprus and that the island has a rich Turkish-Islamic heritage owing to centuries-long Turkish rule. Until such time as the Greek Cypriot side accepts this reality and engages in a dialogue on the basis of the existence of two sovereign States, there can be no prospects for reconciliation between the two peoples and an eventual partnership settlement.

I should be grateful if the text of the present letter were circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda item 62, and of the Security Council.

(Signed) Aytuğ PLÜMER
Representative
Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus